

DRAMA **CRITIQUE**

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THE PUBLIC IS TO BLAME

By JOHN GASSNER

Read at the National Catholic Theatre Conference Convention, August 23, 1961, at the Statler-Hilton Hotel, New York City, at a panel discussion with Harold Clurman and Robert Whitehead.

After what may be considered the worst Broadway season since the end of World War II, negative appraisals of the recent past may be superfluous and predictions for the near future may be redundant. Nevertheless, I am going to chance a few appraisals and predictions.

I would observe, to start with, that our audiences have been no more successful than our plays. The public has contracted the habit of falling all over itself to see a few plays, for reasons that have little to do with the essential merit of the work, and of neglecting other productions at least as meritorious, including such plays of the past season as *All the Way Home*, *Big Fish*, *Little Fish* that the press praised and perhaps even overpraised.

I blame the public, in part, for affording no other alternative to extravagant success than crass failure. This is the rule on Broadway, and it has also begun to be the rule in the off-Broadway theatre, in which *The Blacks* by Genet has been the only unqualified success of the past season. I suspect that something similar to this inequity has been observable in smaller community theatres, and it is certainly true of the big cities toured by Broadway productions prior or subsequent to the Broadway opening. Seldom does a production fail to lose money on tour without at least one of two inducements—*big stars*, whether well cast or ill cast, for the pre-Broadway tour, and a big Broadway reputation, whether deserved or undeserved, for the post-Broadway tour.

This is the American people, I am talking about, and not any single segment of it—a people that has admirable qualities but that never learned to support the arts on any large scale. With or without subsidy, this country should have had active professional productions, vigorous civic enterprises in theatre, and a substantial public for outstanding old and new plays (with or without repertory), year in and year out, in at least a dozen large cities.

We say very little when we put the blame on a so-called middle-class public. There is too little evidence that a working-class public is any better. In the first place, it doesn't exist, and it has made at best only picayune efforts to create popular-priced theatre of its own since the 1930's. In the second place, "working-class" values and interests are virtually the same as those of the middle class. Our working-class population adheres to materialistic values to the same degree, and has been just as thoroughly brainwashed by big business, big advertising, big television, and big gov-

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ernment, as by the little business, little advertising, little television, and little government that follow the same pattern.

We don't really say much either when we talk glibly of the expense-account public. It is very true that this public patronizes the big, brassy musicals, boosting their success. Still, I don't see any harm in this, especially since these musicals are apt to be richer in theatrical qualities than the average non-musical play that this expense-account public does *not* patronize. The rest of the public does not patronize these plays either—and I am not particularly perturbed by this disinclination to support the humdrum in the name of "serious art" or social obligation. What I care about is the neglect of substantial or provocative or imaginatively charged plays that should not have to depend on any expense-account public, but should have their own public. And I am not thinking of a coterie, a superior "fast set" whose numbers are as small as their pretensions are large. I am thinking rather of the very same public that gives a few productions extravagant success from time to time and dooms the rest—the so-called "in-between" meritorious plays not geared to smash-hit proportions by spectacular and sensational elements—to almost instant extinction by cautiously absenting itself from the theatres. The seriousness of this public's defection will be evident to anyone who reflects that most of the plays that gave the modern theatre some claim to cultural or artistic significance were "in-between plays." I include most of the work of Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Shaw, Synge, O'Casey, Pirandello, Lorca, O'Neill, Claudel, and many other important playwrights in this category.

We cannot of course exempt other factors from responsibility in the crisis of the American theatre highlighted by the failure of the past season. Most of these are indeed distinctly familiar, although they bear more looking into than we think.

The high cost of theatre tickets has undoubtedly been a deterring factor on Broadway, as has of course the high cost of theatrical production. The same deterrents have begun to operate in the off-Broadway theatre. Real estate is an important consideration here, and the solution is probably "decentralization" of the theatre, although I do not consider this a panacea at all. The high cost of playgoing, moreover, is probably a secondary factor, since the price of nearly everything else has gone up proportionately. It is extremely doubtful that the theatre would be in a flourishing condition today even if it had retained its old price scale, assuming that this had been at all possible. The flourishing musicals are much more costly. Also, the American people, probably the most wasteful in the world, have not been deterred from paying out vast sums of money in cocktail-hour drinking, gluttony, gadgetry, and a great variety of other vapid indulgences and unnecessary purchases; a considerable part of our economy indeed has been pyramided on the cultivation of waste.

Far more serious is the high cost of theatrical production itself because it discourages producers from undertaking the production of original or controversial plays. These are re-routed to off-Broadway theatres, where they can languish less expensively if kept running, and where the irretrievable investment is bound to be much smaller. Had the Theatre Guild, my old organization and Harold Clurman's, started on Broadway in 1949 instead of 1919, it would have been unable to produce without

substantial subsidy the plays by Tolstoy, Turgenev, Strindberg, Ibsen, Shaw, Werfel, Capek, Benavente, Schnitzler, Molnar, Toller, Kaiser, Rice, Lawson, Pirandello, Behrman, Barry, and others that gave that organization its eminence between 1919 and the early 1930's. A number of these plays, I may add, did no better in recent years even when produced in off-Broadway theatres; not even this year's revival of Denis Johnston's distinguished drama *The Moon in the Yellow River*, originally recommended to the Guild by Harold Clurman, which got an excellent press last season.

This brings us to the new plays themselves. The average American plays are now *worse than average*; they are now *banal*. Areas of experience, such as those once represented by regional plays and sociological dramas upon which Paul Green, Lynn Riggs, Sidney Howard, Elmer Rice, and others had founded respectable reputations, have apparently been drained of color and vigor. Domestic problems that once seemed challenging have become the worn coinage of radio and television drama. This is also true of political drama, although a little candor still seems quite fresh to the general public when the play is salted with satire or irony; as was the case recently in *The Best Man* and *Advise and Consent*—plays that would have notably advanced the theatre if the younger Dumas had been writing them a full century ago.

Behind these and other kinds of plays, including even poetic dramas, there must lie some particular motion of the spirit and the mind before they can arrest attention. It is ultimately the traffic in banalities and a dearth of creative vision that account for the failure of so many American plays to prevail, on and off Broadway, with dramatic power rather than with accessory sensationalism and sensualism. They express a pervasive mediocrity of mind and spirit. This is less likely to be the case, I think, when the author's position is more or less nihilistic, although it is possible, of course, to be both nihilistic *and* mediocre. At least, the gifted nihilist does not try to fob us off with trivial soap-opera concerns and tepid reassurances. His willingness to face an impasse is intelligent and may have a touch of heroism or a defiance in it that amounts to bravura. This, in my opinion, gives the current avant-garde in the theatre some measure of distinction. But it is a pinchbeck distinction by comparison with the genuine masterpieces of the past because the nihilistic play tends to be sophomorically elementary; and, above all, because in being antihumanistic, it tends to be *anti-human*. That is, we encounter, in most of these plays, abstractions and symbols rather than people.

We know a great deal more about playwriting than ever before, but we don't know what to say or show with it that is worth the trouble of saying or showing. We contrive muddles of sentiment, high resolves to compose poetic drama, and ambivalent gestures toward the political right and the left. Last season we did not go much beyond the kindly observation of *All the Way Home*, the melodramatic mélange of religious and anti-Communist sentiment of *The Devil's Advocate*, and the expertly carpentered but ill-founded drama of political intrigue *Advise and Consent*; ill-founded because the issue upon which the action is founded seems made of quicksilver and the ideological props, in so far as I could see them, are hollow. When the foundations are weak, plays that are less expertly propped up than *Advise and Consent* (which is usually the case), cannot, of course, escape collapse.

Let us not beg the question in one way or another by blaming Broadway conditions exclusively, because experts in the novel make much the same charges against the contemporary novel. We might as well face the fact that we are floundering even without the able assistance of real-estate operators, investors, theatre-party operators, and myopic drama critics who see misty mountains where there are only molehills. Let us not beg the question either by complaining about immorality in the theatre when its besetting sin is simply *acedia*—sheer spiritual and mental flabbiness. It is our flaccidity, not our immorality, that has made most contemporary playwriting incapable of sustaining a vital theatre, or of even drawing paying customers to the box office.

There is no sustaining set of values for a generally vital theatre today. Therefore more than ever, we are dependent upon infrequent miracles of private inspiration and special grace in individual jobs of playwriting and play production. The anti-life inhumanism of the extreme avant-garde hasn't supplied our deficiency of values either, and is not likely to do so. Nor is the bias of the political right beating the anti-communist drum, the political left beating anti-capitalist drum, and the political center blowing the forlorn piccolo of tepid liberalism. The canker is deeply rooted in the world we have made and are obviously not improving.

After saying this, moreover, I have no predictions worth making *in extenso*. I expect special dispensations in the case of individual talent and perhaps even in an individual season "on" and "off" Broadway, but I do not expect a general and reliable improvement. So long as our society holds together somehow, I expect that our theatre will also hold together somehow. I also hope for developments in the Lincoln Square project, municipal, state, and federal assistance, and continued strengthening of individual seasons by the best of off-Broadway enterprise. But my hope is too like despair for me to offer it with any approximation of confidence. I do expect continued growth and improvement in the American theatre that is neither *on* Broadway nor *off* Broadway, but on the general terrain of America—in schools, universities, and communities beyond New York.

But while it is possible for me to be confident in predicting growth, I am inclined to limit my expectations of improvement to stage production rather than to original American playwriting. The latter requires an abundance of life and an amplitude of vision which I simply cannot detect on the horizon. My conclusion is that we shall have to learn to make the most of what we have available from the past and the present, and from Europe as well as the United States. Thus the past season was considerably sustained by plays from Ireland, England, and France.

Of one thing alone am I completely certain. It is that we must and shall continue to create theatre regardless of risk and discouragement—partly because the theatre retains its fascination and partly because nothing is so hard for anyone who has experienced this fascination as not to try to do something about it. Nevertheless, I must close as I began: The root of the problem lies with the American people. How they are *educated* or *miseducated*, and what they accept or reject will determine the normal course of our theatre for good or for ill. Their values and tastes are and will always be quintessential. The more I consider our problem the more I am convinced that in order to have a successful American theatre, the audience too, must be a success.

AGREEMENT AT MIDNIGHT

By EMMET LAVERY

Well, it wasn't really midnight. It was about two o'clock in the morning when five playwrights found themselves together in a restaurant in the east fifties in New York—and found, strangely enough, that they were in agreement on many things. But it all began at midnight. . . .

* * *

My wife and I were in New York (November 1960) celebrating our thirty-fifth wedding anniversary. We had only two days in town. So, on the first night, we went to see Brendan Behan's *The Hostage*. On the second night, we went to see Anouilh's *Becket* in which our old friend Tony Quinn was starring with Sir Laurence Olivier.

This made for quite a full schedule, especially since I had gone backstage to see Tony after the last curtain of *Becket*. It was just about midnight when we got to the Algonquin and I suggested a nightcap before we turned in.

"Not for me," murmured Genevieve. "It's been a wonderful evening and I don't need anything more. You have the nightcap, if you feel like it!"

Well, I'm not what the Irish would call a drinking man. But there are moments when it is just too early to go to bed. So I wandered into the tiny bar, just off the main lounge, and there in the stately shadows I saw a vaguely familiar figure, a warm and engaging figure that I hadn't seen in some fifteen years. Was it Wilder? I couldn't be sure at first, for Thornton was doing the listening—just like a father confessor—and an obvious stranger was doing all the talking.

With some diffidence, I went up and introduced myself. Yes, indeed—it was Thornton. First the smile, that starts in the eyes. And then—where was I staying? What was I doing? Where was I going now?

"I'm going upstairs to bed," I explained. "I'm just down here for a nightcap."

"Nonsense. It's too early to go to bed. Besides, I haven't had any supper and I'd like company. Tell you what—you go upstairs, wake up your wife and tell her to come along. Tell her we're going to meet Brendan Behan along the way."

Brendan Behan! That did it. Up I went, to wake up Genevieve, but she was too sleepy to wake up for anyone. Wilder? Yes, she remembered Thornton. Behan?

Emmet Lavery, one of the founders of the National Catholic Theatre Conference, is the author of The First Legion, Monsignor's Hour, The Magnificent Yankee, and other plays. He is currently working on a dramatization of The Ladies of Soissons by the late Sidney Cunliffe-Owen.

Yes, it would be fun to meet the author of *The Hostage* . . . but you can't get a good night's sleep every night. So—

Down I went alone to meet Thornton and there, in the bar, he was saying good-night to the stranger—a fine doctor, just in from Indo-China. And, as we made our farewells, the doctor was whispering to me: "Now, tell me—what was the name of our friend? Wilder, you say? What does he do?"

In the taxi, Thornton explains that the supper we are taking in is really Leonard Lyons' party. "But who cares whose party it is? We'll have a chance to talk first. And remember—you are my guest. No—no—we don't get together often enough for us to argue about it."

It was like meeting a favorite uncle after an absence of many years. . . . I thought back to the first time that I had met him in New Haven . . . it was 1938 . . . I was working in Federal Theatre and had gone up to give a lecture at Albertus Magnus College . . . there had been some correspondence with Thornton . . . he had seen *First Legion* in Europe some years before and he had liked my play on Cardinal Newman . . . so he suggested that we have dinner at his club before the lecture . . . all of which was fine, but I was hardly prepared for the fact that, when dinner was over, he insisted on accompanying me to the lecture . . . a lecture he could have given with so much more authority.

"Yes, indeed—I still remember that evening," Thornton recalls. "Still see the Sisters up there. Now, tell me—what are you doing these days? Apart from becoming a grandfather again?"

The talk turns to the current theatre and we discover that we both had been to the same performance of *Becket*. In fact, Thornton was backstage calling on Sir Laurence when I was calling on Tony Quinn.

I want to ask a lot of questions. What about Anouilh's view of history and the generally accepted view? What about—to borrow a question from Genevieve—what about that silly wife of Henry? Was that really Eleanor of Aquitaine?

"Now—now, my boy," murmurs Thornton. "What difference does it make, at least for a few hours in the theatre? Let Anouilh have his way. Besides, it is fun, isn't it—and what a beautiful production—what a superb way to do a play! We should all be so lucky . . . the production lifts the play immeasurably . . . of course, part of the difficulty is that Anouilh's *Henry* and your friend Quinn's *Henry* are running away with a good part of the play and Larry doesn't quite know what to do about it."

(At this point, perhaps, it would be appropriate to report that these notes were originally assembled in November 1960. Since that time, Sir Laurence has applied himself to the basic "difficulty" with considerably ingenuity. When Tony Quinn left the cast in the spring of 1961 and was succeeded by Arthur Kennedy, the role of King Henry was assumed by Sir Laurence. In the fall of 1961, when announcement was made at London of plans for a film production, it was indicated that Sir Laurence might play both Henry and Becket.)

Just as we pull up at the restaurant, I raise a question about mutual friends now in Europe: a couple recently divorced, the husband a writer of some prominence, the marriage, one that had lasted for more than twenty years. At one time they had both been students of Thornton at the University of Chicago.

"Please, let's not talk about it . . . shall we? There are sad things that happen in the world . . . unavoidable things . . . things one can do nothing about . . . but this . . . this was so unnecessary . . . it didn't have to be . . . let's not talk about it."

* * *

In the restaurant, Thornton chooses a quiet corner and orders for both of us—in French. So the talk turns to Fenelon, about whom I had done a play, largely as a result of some teasing from Thornton. It was performed in German at the State Theatre of Basel in 1956 and it was well received, but I thought that some revisions might be in order. Did Thornton think it might be wise for me to make room for Madame Guion in Act II? Perhaps I should have done this before, but at one time I hesitated. I didn't want this play to be another Heloise-and-Abelard because this was not the relationship between Fenelon and Madame Guion—even though she was one of the complicating and resolving forces in his life.

"Yes—yes—you may have to allow some room for Madame Guion," Thornton agrees. "But you need not worry. Don't you know the great lines of Saint Simon—he practically made a new French verb in the process . . . he said . . . it was their 'sublime selves' that were 'amalgamated.'"

"You were very fortunate in *The First Legion* and in *Fenelon*," Thornton observes at another point. "You were writing from the inside—not from the outside—you were really seeing the characters from the inside. I'm afraid one can't always say the same about Anouilh in *Becket*."

"What about that long scene between the very Italian Cardinal and the very Italian Pope?" I asked. "Does it serve any real purpose in the play? Doesn't it just get in the way?"

"You must understand the French mind—at least as it works in the theatre. The French have never gotten over the French Revolution—and so, in the middle of a play, in which Anouilh is reasonably sentimental about Becket, he must pause long enough to make faces at the Vatican. It's a kind of *walking-on-the-tightrope* scene—just made for the French—they probably thought it one of the finest things in the play."

A few moments later, Thornton is asking with a quizzical air: "What are you going to do next? Are you going to keep on doing historical figures?"

I forget about the play that Tony Quinn and I have been talking about reviving—*The Gentleman from Athens*—in which he starred for one quick week back in 1947 . . . instead, I start to talk about a play I'd like to do about some people in Fiesoli, high above Florence . . . something in the style of Barry's *Hotel Universe* . . . something about people who stop long enough to take a long look at life, in a moment of crisis. . . .

"Hmm . . . all right . . . if you don't spend too much time on those wealthy American expatriates who live up in the hills above Florence . . . they're really not so much to write about!"

I go into a few details and Thornton responds with enthusiasm. Yes, the characters are interesting and so are their ideas. And as for the Sister, the one who is like a Blue Nun, the one who runs the elaborate hostel at which everyone stays—did I know that Alice B. Toklas was reported to have become a Blue Nun?

"The main thing for you and me, for all of us," says Thornton, "is that we should write what we believe in—only what we believe in. Nothing else!"

The talk turns to West Germany, where Thornton's plays have been popular—mine too—and the question of the German character in the post-war world presents itself. What is the real "nature of the enemy"—the enemy who was once our enemy and is now our friend? Isn't it the same situation that we faced in the last scene of *The Skin of Our Teeth*?

"I wanted to deal with this in a film, in a story about the July 20 revolt against Hitler," I tell Thornton. "But it was hard to interest anyone in Hollywood—although there had been two films on the subject in West Germany. Perhaps it might be done in a play—even if it had to be a minor theme?"

"Yes, of course—in a play," Thornton says. "But I doubt that it could be held down to a minor theme. It would keep coming through, in spite of you—larger and larger. It's a major theme and it deserves to be stated by major characters."

Will I ever do this play and will I do it on this particular theme? I'm not sure but I know that I agree with Thornton. One should write only what one believes in. And I do believe that all of the Germans were not the same, nor are they today. I believe that there were men of honor who went to their death on July 20, 1944. I believe that there were men of honor who survived the Hitler purge that followed. I believe that they deserve the continued attention of the free world, the living as well as the dead.

Within the hour we are joined by Leonard Lyons, Brendan Behan and his wife, Gore Vidal, Paddy Chayevsky and Mrs. Kenneth Tynan. Two tables are put together to make one festal board and the talk flows easily. Some of us had known each other before, some had not—but what difference did it make? Without a camera, without a tape recorder, without an audience, the conversation is unforced and vigorous. Thornton is as happy as a great-uncle with a flock of admiring nephews.

"How do you tell a man like Wilder that you admire him?" Chayevsky whispers to me. "On first meeting him—I mean? I have all of his plays and I know them very well but it seems so obvious to tell him so, doesn't it?"

The talk turns to Chayevsky's *The Tenth Man* which Wilder liked very much. (I had not seen the play, but read it a few days later, as I flew home, and found it wonderfully warm and enchanting.) The play had been directed by Tyrone Guthrie who had also directed Wilder's *Alcesteiad* at the Edinburgh Festival a few years before.

"There was only one point in the play where I felt let down," Wilder tells Chayevsky. "In the scene of exorcism, where the feeling for the supernatural should come through strong and clear, I felt a certain dip. Could this have been the fault of the actors or the director? Guthrie, of course, is a fine director, but I am of the opinion that there are two things he is inclined to walk around in the theatre, to leave undeveloped. One is love—the other is the supernatural!"

The talk switches to politics and Gore Vidal, whose play *The Best Man* is still one of the big hits, tells us about his campaign for Congress in Dutchess County. He lost the district but he carried my home city, Poughkeepsie, where I was president of the Board of Aldermen from 1929 to 1933. Will he run for public office again? He's not sure, but it is quite clear that he enjoyed the experience. He went everywhere; he met everyone; he talked to everyone—and came face to face with the realities of politics, without becoming cynical or disenchanted. . . .

Brendan Behan stands up to take off his vest and it's plain to be seen that tonight he is definitely "off the gargle." He is as sober as the proverbial judge and twice as stimulating. He does not argue over trifles and there is an engaging directness about everything he says.

"How is that conservative cousin of yours in Dublin?" Brendan asks me. "The judge—Justice Cecil Lavery is his name—the one who's always writing letters to the papers about the characters in Joyce's stories!"

"How do you know he's my cousin?" I ask, recalling that I had dined with Justice Cecil Lavery in Dublin in 1954, also his brother, Justice Philip Lavery. Rare men, both of them.

"Ah, all of you Laverys are related somewhere along the line," Brendan assures me. "Justice Cecil comes from Belfast, doesn't he? Don't your folks? Sure, they

all come from Belfast and they're all related, one way or another. And a lot of them have their names on a lot of first-class pubs!"

We talk a little about *Borstal Boy*, a book to which I was introduced by an old Paulist friend, Father John McGarity, a priest who had served as chaplain in three armies. Brendan begins to smile. A priest who liked *Borstal Boy*? That is a bit of all right!

Thornton now takes over. He has a few questions of his own. When does Brendan plan on leaving Dublin?

"Leave Dublin? Why should I be leaving Dublin? It's my town—"

"Yes—yes, of course," says Thornton soothingly. "But you know how it is there. It's a beautiful city, but look what it does to its own people. If a man rises just a bit in the world, especially the literary world, there's someone ready to pull him down. And then there is a certain air of censorship about the place. You'll have to admit that. Look at Joyce—"

"Ah, yes. Poor Joyce—he wasn't happy in Dublin, but then—how could he be? He was a Cork man."

Brendan goes on to comment favorably on a lot of Joyce's work, but he can't go along with *Dubliners*. "Now, there's a word for you . . . who that was ever born in Dublin ever referred to another man from Dublin as a Dubliner . . . I never did . . . no, when you come right down to it, Joyce was a Cork man—poor fellow."

Thornton returns to his basic point: the relation of the Dublin writer to the Dublin environment. It's partly in teasing and partly in earnest. What about O'Casey? He had to leave Dublin too, didn't he?

"Ah, poor O'Casey . . . a great writer . . . but how could he possibly feel at home in Dublin . . . he was a Protestant."

This brings down the house. When order is restored, Thornton continues with the questions. Apart from his plays and apart from his books, just what kind of a man is Brendan?

The answer comes quick and strong. "I'll tell you what kind of a man I am," says Brendan quite simply. "In the daylight hours I'm a Robert Ingersoll man . . . but in the dark hours of the night . . . strictly John XXIII."

Thornton is delighted. This, he assures us, is the history of the Irish and the French as well. At least in the theatre. Anti-clerical by night.

"Watch out," Thornton tells Brendan. "They'll be after you yet . . . they're bound to be . . . you can't avoid it . . . neither can they."

"Maybe," says Brendan with a firm smile. "But it's my town—and I intend to stay there, as long as I want. No one is going to drive me out!"

The talk switches to films. Gore Vidal is not happy with what Hollywood did to *Visit to A Small Planet* and Chayevsky has some wry comments about his work in Hollywood on a film treatment of the life of Edna St. Vincent Millay.

"That reminds me," pipes up Brendan. "We had a saying in Ireland, when I was a boy . . . we had a saying that anyone who had Vincent for a middle name was a phoney."

"Oh, Millay wasn't a phoney," Thornton is quick to point out. "But you might say that her work was calculated—mathematically calculated."

Chayevsky would like to talk about the film version of *Inherit the Wind*. He feels—most of us are inclined to agree with him—that the issues which remain in the film version of the play don't seem too large these days and that, consequently, the range of character for the two lawyers isn't too large either. The gulf between religion and science is not as big as it was in the days of the Scopes trial. And so—

"Maybe it's Darwin who's dated," suggests Chayevsky. "Maybe he just doesn't fit in any more—"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," Thornton demurs. "There might be some matters in which he wouldn't seem too relevant but there are vast areas which he still illuminates!"

Chayevsky would like to join issue then and there, but Thornton looks us over with fond and quizzical concern. "There are so *many* other things to talk about . . . and besides, we could hardly settle this issue tonight, now could we?"

In a flash, the talk is off to other things . . . the work of Bertolt Brecht . . . and Wilder's belief that it was Kurt Weill's music which gave Brecht the extra vitality and popularity . . . particularly in this country . . .

At four-thirty a.m. we were still at it, long after everyone else in the restaurant has gone home to bed. And I begin to wonder . . . why has it been such an amiable and such an agreeable evening . . . was it because of Thornton . . . was he the catalytic agent that fused and transfused the evening . . . or was it that we are all of us believers . . . believers in something . . . even if it wasn't always the same thing? Is it possible that yea-sayers have more in common than nay-sayers?

As we get up to leave, Thornton is talking about Georges Simenon. "He tells me he never reads any contemporary work, on the chance that he might admire it. But I'll read all of you!"

The Behans and Thornton and I are staying at the Algonquin, so we take a cab back to the hotel. It's a relaxing drive and I assure Brendan that he's made my work easy for the upcoming week-end. I have a lecture to give in Maryland at St. Joseph's College (Emmitsburg) and, if I can be properly discreet, I'll bolster it with a few recollections of this unexpected evening.

"Oh, so you're giving a lecture? Well, as a matter of fact, I'm giving a lecture tomorrow—down in Pennsylvania."

"Where—in Pennsylvania?"

"Bryn Mawr."

At the hotel there is a telegram for Brendan and, as we ride up in the elevator, Brendan opens the wire and reads it. The message is from David Susskind and it includes an invitation to appear on *Open End*.

"*Open End*? Now—what would that be?"

Thornton gives a quick report on the success of the three-hour-conversation-piece and Brendan eyes the telegram with a dubious look.

"It might be very good for you—and for the play," Thornton points out.

"Maybe so—maybe so—but it pays *no money*!"

* * *

Some weeks later the memory of the evening is still a warm afterglow for many of us.

Leonard Lyons writes about it in his column in the *New York Post*. And then, in a letter, adds the thought which is in the mind of all of us . . . "what a night it was. . . ."

"I am delighted that you read *The Tenth Man*," writes Chayevsky. "I still think I am right and Thornton Wilder wrong about the permanent value of Darwin. I would like very much to repeat that splendid evening we all had at the Brasserie."

And then comes a note from Thornton, commenting on our evening, also on the article on Philip Barry which I had done for *Drama Critique* (November 1960):

"Many thanks for the article and your words on it. It would have made Phil very happy. We have all owed happy hours to Phil. We could wish that a baleful witch had not leaned over his cradle (and Scott Fitzgerald's) and whispered: 'You will be infatuated by the very rich and your infatuation will drain energies from you, that should be aglow with admiration for better things than *that*.'"

"I can stand people who are crazy about money but I can't understand those who adore the moneyed. Avarice has the dignity of a vice; snobbery is a sorry mistake about what is excellent. . . .

"I hope you told Mrs. Lavery that I suggested that you wake her up for our junket. Assure her that we missed her. Did you tell her: five dramatists together and in amicable harmony? You brought that dove of peace with you. . . ." No, I'm not convinced it was I who brought the dove of peace to our gathering.

I think it was Thornton. But then it might also have been Brendan, Gore Vidal, Paddy Chayevsky—and the two wives.

Not so long ago, I ran into a psychiatrist at the home of another psychiatrist. When the talk turned to writing and writers, I tried to describe for him just what had taken place at our meeting in New York.

"Yes, of course—don't you see what happened?" my friend declared. "It's what always happens when there is communication between people—communication without the necessity of converting someone else to your opinion. You were five people communicating in the free spirit of free people—"

Was that it? Perhaps it was. We didn't think of ourselves as free spirits communicating with equally free spirits. But maybe that's the way it is—when it is!

GRATIEN GELINAS: CANADA'S MAN OF THE POPULAR THEATRE

By MARC GERVAIS, S.J.

About three years ago, in the heart of French-speaking downtown Montreal, slightly east of the swankier English-speaking business section, a renovated theatre reopened its doors to an excited public—and in so doing fulfilled the hopes and dreams of French-Canada's theatre people. Canada could now at long last boast of a superb theatre building specifically dedicated to the presentation of Canadian plays; and its very name—La Comédie-Canadienne—stimulated Canadian pride and ambition. The Stratford Ontario Summer Festivals and the international success of *Le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde* had, it is true, already demonstrated that Canada's English and French actors and actresses could form first-rate Canadian acting companies. But more was needed if a theatre that is truly Canadian in its every aspect was to exist. Actors were all important; but playwrights, too, would have to be encouraged, even pushed a little into creating Canadian plays. And now, for the first time, here it was: a theatre whose *raison d'être* was to give Canadian playwrights of both languages a splendid house for their works.

The Comédie-Canadienne is a sort of promised land that many strove to reach. And yet, in spite of the universality of its appeal, it is truly the creation of one man, and stands as a sort of living monument to his tremendous all around achievement. That man is Gratien Gelinas, generally considered to be top man in this, or any other, era of the Canadian theatre. It was Gelinas who secured the financial backing—this alone makes him a quasi-thaumaturge in a theatre-arid land—to buy an old burlesque house and to renovate it completely; he helped redesign it into what is unquestionably one of the finest theatres on the American continent; he is its chief administrator and director; and his ideals give it a policy and a purpose. And as if that were not enough to stamp the Comédie with his personality, Gelinas, through most of last season, from August until May, executed a one-man theatrical tour de force probably unique in North America: in his own theatre, he starred in a hit play, *Bousille et les Justes*, which he himself wrote, directed, and produced.

Bousille et les Justes (whose English adaptation appeared in Montreal in March, 1961) has been the most popular play yet presented at the Comédie-Canadienne. As a matter of fact, it stands at the moment as the second most successful Canadian play ever written. All of which means that Gratien Gelinas, who so far has written only two full-length plays, has become the Canadian theatre's perennial super-star who walks off with all the prizes, since he was also writer, director, producer, and star of the all-time box office champion, *Tit-Coq*, which played in French and in English to nearly half a million Canadians between 1948 and 1951, before repeating its success story as a Gelinas movie.

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**Gratien Gelinas: Canada's Man of the
Popular Theatre**

**Gratien Gelinas as
Charles VI in
Shakespeare's
Henry V at Stratford,
Ontario, 1956**



**Gratien Gelinas and Hélène Loiselle in a scene from
"Bousille and the Just," as staged at La Comédie Canadienne**

Gélinas is a sort of national hero to all Canadians, both English and French. But being a French-Canadian and doing most of his work in French, he quite naturally is most idolized by the theatre-goers of the province of Quebec, who claim him as their very own. His story, indeed, is one of dazzling success and popularity from the first day he graduated from radio to the stage, as actor, writer, and producer in 1938. In those days, he limited himself to writing and playing one single character, a Chaplin-like imp (only this one spoke!) called Fridolin; he did it so brilliantly that Fridolin all but robbed Gélinas of his identity. For ten years, Fridolin proceeded to romp through annual Gélinas revues, completely capturing the imagination of the Montreal public, which roared in delight as he mercilessly poked fun at any and all of Canada's sacred cows—and incidentally drawing ten times as many customers as any other Montreal theatrical venture. By the end of a decade, however, Gélinas had tired of Fridolin. He turned to more serious theatre, and in 1948 created the serious comedy already mentioned, *Tit-Coq*, which kept him artistically and financially occupied in one way or another for some five years.

Through the '40's and '50's, acting, writing, directing, and producing kept Gélinas busy; and the Gélinas legend and popularity were continually growing. He had been in the business for nearly twenty years when, in 1958, he took a step carefully planned and calculated to shake the Canadian theatre out of its lethargy; he opened his own theatre, the Comédie-Canadienne. So now Gélinas had a new role thrust upon him, that of a combined Maecenas-Midas, eager to help young playwrights stage their plays, and to guide them along the path of success he knows so well. Facing up to the challenge, Gélinas, the impresario, immediately set out looking for fresh Canadian plays; he managed to find a few, and staged them in his Comédie-Canadienne—but none with nearly so much success as his own *Bousille et les Justes*.

Gélinas, it would seem, has conquered every aspect of the Canadian theatre. And yet, in spite of his great popular appeal and achievement, there are some who begrudge him his present position of eminence because of what they consider his limited aesthetic outlook. Gélinas enjoys a great deal of prestige all over Canada, but like the prophet, he finds the going much tougher among certain intellectuals of the theatre in his home province of Quebec where a strong current of critical opinion damns his playwriting. All, of course, agree that he is a theatrical administrative genius of the first order, gifted with a sixth sense that tells him infallibly how an audience will react. And his acting ability, too, has received kudos from all sides. English-speaking critics, who have watched him, in some of his less frequent appearances in English-speaking plays, steal *St. Lazare's Pharmacy* from Miriam Hopkins in 1945, repeat the *Tit-Coq* triumph in English in 1950, and glitter as Charles VI in the Stratford, Ontario production of *Henry V* in 1956, join their French-speaking fellows in placing Gélinas at the very top of the Canadian acting profession. As a playwright, however, Gélinas is not so unanimously acknowledged a master. Paradoxically, English-speaking Canada seems to take his playwriting mastery for granted, accepting his two plays as good works, the finest yet written by a Canadian. But in French Canada the intellectuals in general, and the theatre people in particular, are divided into two well-defined camps. Depending on which group they belong to, they either praise or condemn Gélinas' latest offering, *Bousille et les Justes*.

That this should be so becomes quite inevitable when seen from the historical point of view. Prior to 1937, there had been, strictly speaking, no professional Canadian theatre of any consequence. Although amateur theatre dates back as far as the founding of the country, and, with many an ebb and flow, has continued to be an important factor ever since, the only professional theatre worthy of the name had been furnished by touring companies from France, England, and the United States. The 1880-1914 period in particular witnessed tremendous activity of this sort, as wave upon wave of foreign professionals, from the great Sarah Bernhardt to names now remembered by no one, invaded Montreal—which has always been, and still is, Canada's leading city of the theatre—, Toronto, and lesser points east and west. But the Great War put an end to that, and after 1914, even foreign professional theatre all but disappeared from Canada, except for occasional, limited visits, which continue to this day, but which are only a shadow of the good old days. By 1937, the Montreal stage could boast of nothing better than amateurish imitations of Paris boulevard comedies and second-rate revues, all of which were ill rehearsed and doomed to three or four performances at best.

It was then that a young Holy Cross priest destined to occupy a very high place in the history of the Canadian theatre, Père Émile Legault, returned from his studies in France, where he had worked with Jacques Copeau, Léon Chancerel, and other leading spirits of the French theatre. Surveying the drab Montreal scene, Père Legault decided to reach for the stars, even if it meant starting a veritable revolution. Steeped in the awesomely high aesthetic of the best French theatre—the line still survives in Barrault, extending through Jouvet, the Dasté's, Chancerel, Decroux, back to Copeau—he founded a company of young actors, *Les Compagnons de Saint-Laurent*, whose aim it was to “establish in Canada a cultural theatre that is poetic, spiritual, and popular in a Christian climate.” For the first time, a Canadian group was to aim at achieving a highly refined art, performing only the finest plays, and employing a style of acting that was disciplined, intellectualized, highly stylized, and thoroughly French. The idea was to give Canadians a whiff of true beauty, and to draw them up to a level of appreciation hitherto beyond their reach.

The *Compagnons* made theatrical history, and though they broke up in 1951, Père Legault's influence continues unabated. Some of his young actors and actresses founded troupes of their own; the most notable among them is the world-famous *Théâtre du Nouveau Monde*. Many others, too, tried to follow his lead. Today, Montreal is dotted with a number of exciting small theatres impregnated, to a greater or lesser degree, with the Legault aesthetic. More than that, a whole school of university and college professors and students, as well as many of Montreal's leading critics and lovers of the drama, share a view of the theatre that is decidedly inspired by the Copeau-Legault ideal. Not that there is perfect fidelity, of course, to the Legault position, for many of the disciples have branched off on their own, obeying the siren call of plays not at all in keeping with “the Christian climate”; some even have espoused the cause of the avant-garde theatre of negation. And while Père Legault had turned to Copeau for his aesthetic ideals, he nonetheless hoped that eventually his ideals would inform truly Canadian plays, springing from the Canadian culture. Certain of his followers, in their worship of the Continental theatre, have forgotten this second aspect, and to all intents and purposes seem bent on making of Montreal nothing more than a pale reflection of Paris, spurning their own French-

Canadian milieu. Many, too, incapable of reaching the high standards set by Père Legault, have turned to art for art's sake. Although all share an avowed concern for "style," too often much of their output is simply not good theatre; some of their plays fail, and they cast envious eyes at Gélinas, whom they consider an inferior artist, but who manages to do ever so much better at the box office.

That a goodly number of Montreal's theatre people—many of whom, trained as they are in Paris, attempt to transplant Parisian models to French-Canadian soil—should look askance at *Bousille et les Justes* is not at all surprising. The play falls short of the Copeau ideal: it rarely transcends the naturalistic with nary a glimpse of poetry; its characters at times tend to be stereotypes, or even caricatures, as Gélinas, the old master of the revue, occasionally sacrifices depth for the fast, sure-fire gag; and the action, static in the expository beginning, becomes too melodramatically neat at the end. Many feel that the play lacks intellectual appeal and refinement, smacking rather of the bourgeois and the vulgar.

But the people love it, and well they might. Gélinas has no qualms about giving them a good dose of the ABC's of drama: a good story filled with color, passion, pathos, suspense, and dramatic situations exploited to the full. Above all, *Bousille* is thoroughly French-Canadian in every way, holding up the mirror to French-Canadian life, ringing with the accents of every-day Quebec-French, and reflecting the bourgeois, deeply Catholic way of life so typical among the French-Canadians. This play may fall short of true greatness, but it scores on two very important counts: it is thoroughly Canadian, and thoroughly enjoyable.

Gratien Gélinas readily admits that his *Tit-Coq* and his *Bousille* are not all-time masterpieces; and yet he feels that they are good examples of what the Canadian theatre desperately needs at the moment. Genuinely concerned with the criticism of those who oppose his views, but still convinced that his way is the best—if not the only—way to establish a strong, creative, original, and independent Canadian theatre, he has on many occasions given his particular views on the facts of Canadian theatrical life.

He feels—and in this all generally agree—that there will never be a vital and vigorous Canadian theatre until there are good Canadian playwrights writing steadily for a large Canadian audience—which is by no means the case at the moment. The Canadian theatre is only beginning. The old audience for road shows ceased to exist after 1914, and now a new one must be formed, one not limited to the intellectual, sophisticated few to which the theatre now caters, but one embracing Canadians at all levels of society. Nowadays, however, the average Canadian's experience of drama is limited to the realism he sees in the movies and on television. High poetic fancy, brilliant intellectualism, and, *a fortiori*, avant-garde experimentation—no matter how desirable and excellent they may be in themselves—are beyond his ready acceptance. He must first be tempted away from his TV set by something familiar to both mind and heart. Once he has stepped inside the theatre, and felt that living contact and union between actor and audience in a shared experience—the magic peculiar to the theatre—the battle will be won; he will be converted. After the conversion, of course, he should be led gradually up to more unaccustomed forms of theatre. But the conversion must come first.

And so, Gelinas urges the new Canadian playwrights to aim straight at what is common and elemental to every man—the human heart—and to serve up generous helpings of suspense, passion, laughter, pathos: the things he feels make theatre. For the time being, at least, let the playwrights forgo the dry theatre of ideas. And above all, let them free themselves from artificially imitating the products of foreign countries. With Walter Kerr, he contends that great theatre must reflect the culture out of which it springs; that just as it is unthinkable that Shakespeare and Sophocles could work independently of their Elizabethan and Periclean cultures and still write their masterpieces, so it is impossible for a truly Canadian theatre to blossom into fulfillment if Canadian playwrights turn their backs on their own Canadian culture and slavishly imitate the latest *ism* from overseas or from south of the border.

It is, Gelinas feels, precisely because his own *Tit-Coq* and *Bousille* are based on these principles that they have been immensely successful, and have drawn so many new faces into Canadian theatres. In their direction, he insists, the first toddling steps must be taken; later on, perhaps, will come the poetic masterpieces, but these products of mature and thriving theatres must await their hour, till a well-prepared public is ready to appreciate them.

All of which, naturally, goes counter to the ideals of the Copeau-Legault progeny; and so, the battle goes on, as theatre battles must always go on. A few years ago, in the United States, it was the Walter Kerr-Eric Bentley controversy of popular theatre versus coterie theatre. Today, in Canada, it is Gelinas' home-bred popular theatre versus the more rarefied theatre of higher aesthetics. Neither side, perhaps, is completely with the angels; but one thing is certain: out of the excitement, activity, and rivalry, the Canadian theatre is bound to gain.

Meanwhile, Gratien Gelinas, making no claims to greatness, and quite content with his humble—as he calls it—role of building “the foundations to what may one day become the splendid edifice of the Canadian theatre,” goes on working and planning. At present he is thinking in terms of a new play which he hopes will bring yet more converts into the growing Canadian theatre audience, thus adding to his record of all-round achievement, already unparalleled in Canadian theatrical annals.

METAPHYSICS OF ALIENATION IN TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' SHORT STORIES

By BROTHER LUKE M. GRANDE, F.S.C.

Simultaneous with the *New York Times* advertisements for Tennessee Williams' latest (but short-lived) drama, *Period of Adjustment*, came prophecies of a new and happier direction to his writing. Such predictions seemed not only premature (especially in light of the rather strained comedy that *Period* turned out to be and also word that *The Night of the Iguana*, based on a far-from-hilarious short story, was next due for Broadway consumption), but also, in a sense, ominous; since, despite some critics' objections to his apparently obsessive preoccupation with seamy subjects, it is with his unhappy, fugitive characters that he has provided contemporary American drama with its most serious inquiry into the human predicament.

Tragedy has never yielded easy or happy solutions to man's essential problems, yet it has consistently illumined life, showing it to be perennially a fearful and awe-inspiring thing. Such an undertaking is too rarely embraced by the dramatist today when our stages are overflowing with glittering musicals or sentimentalized and superficial social comedy.

Any fears that Williams will join the "happy breed" may, I think, be laid to rest. Some critics have accused him of bartering his garbage can for a mess of pottage; however, from his first stories and one-act plays to his later full-length dramas, an underlying and fundamentally somber view of life has given to his work a unity that, fortunately, is "the man" and not merely a convention that can be artificially doctored to the tastes of his audiences.

The short stories (most of them are available in two collections, both published by New Directions: *Hard Candy, a Book of Stories* [1959]; and *One Arm, and Other Stories* [1954]) are particularly illuminating, for in them Williams' essential vision is evident even more clearly than in his dramas; the themes are simplified, sharpened, reduced to almost painful clarity. The dramas gain in complexity (if not in subtlety), but the short stories are the seminal stages, the theses, the eggs from which the dramas are hatched. His characters and themes germinate, stir, and metamorphose with the passage of time, producing multiple mutations, sometimes running the gamut of forms: from short story (stories) to one-act play to three-act drama.

One suspects, for example, that "Billy" (with overtones of "Oliver" in "One Arm") of the story "Two on a Party" is the hero also of *Battle of Angels*, which

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became in succession *Orpheus Descending* and *The Fugitive Kind*; "Cora" of the same story is an embryonic "Blanche" of *Streetcar Named Desire*; "Brick" of "Three Players of a Summer Game" eventually becomes the impotent hero of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (even the fat child "Mary Louise" of the same story becomes a whole brood of "no-neck monsters" in *Cat*). Then, of course, there is "Baby Doll" of the one-act "The Long Stay Cut Short, or The Unsatisfactory Supper" who reappears in "Twenty-seven Wagon Loads of Cotton" and eventually gives her name to the full-length movie version; "Portrait of a Girl in Glass" sketches the heroine of *Glass Menagerie*; and we may even see at some later date a new "Lucio" (the dispossessed victim of modern economics who finds consolation in a bedraggled cat), who has already made his appearance in a one-act play and two short stories.

To enter the world of his short stories is thus to come into Williams' study where he is preparing the public dramatic concoction from the distillation of his evolving thoughts.

Nowhere else, for example, than in the short stories does the theme of man's metaphysical alienation stand out quite so clearly as Williams' conception of man's major problem. The stories may be poetic or realistic, or, more probably, may verge upon the allegorical, yet each, while starting down a different road, arrives at the same universal conundrum: man, seeking happiness by understanding through love and union with someone or something, is perpetually lured down false labyrinths that leave him staring at the blank wall of his neurotic self; starting again and again on his lonely hegira, like Christian in the Valley of Despond, he is tricked into hope in a hopeless maze, the doors labeled "Answer" opening only into himself and he is ever alone. On no other psychiatric couch has the agony of man's isolation been so carefully analyzed.

Is this isolation simply self-dramatization, egotism, or a sentimental pose? Hardly. The uniqueness of each soul, the impossibility of its breaking out of its fragile box of flesh to find here a lasting city, is, after all, the temporal condition of man. His search is for the total communion, the total love for which he was meant; and his futile shifts at substitutes are eloquent hound-of-heaven reminders of every man's destiny.

Williams' intransigence then, in pursuing each individual search and its ultimately puzzled frustration, is what gives him his peculiar universality and power, and dictates, to some extent, his choice of subjects. For the complacent, the static, the euphoric "bourgeois" who rests happily in his ersatz heaven-on-earth, there is no problem: he has been adequately distracted from his ultimate goal by sex or success in *Vanity Fair*. But for the restless fugitives of Williams' nightmarish world, nothing as yet has solved the insoluble problem. And this is as far, perhaps, as Williams dares to go at present. The problem in spatial and temporal terms is insoluble and his dazed or dreamy heroes and heroines continue their journey or recognize that they will not end it with anything the world has to offer. For today's theater, so much is gain; and so much is very much.

Unlike the existentialist who concludes that the struggle itself is the meaning of life, Williams refuses to accept, gratefully, merely the pursuit of happiness, and

recalls us (perhaps in rather tenuous and negative terms, it is true) to some transcendent end for which man was intended. He does not, therefore, seem to merit the facile epithet, "another twentieth-century pessimist," simply because he repudiates the slick solutions offered by the humanitarians, the epicureans, the hedonists, or the pseudo-philosophers.

To claim a fundamental, that is a metaphysical, optimism for Williams is to raise the usual questions of those who find his characters—those degenerates and off-scourings of the earth—depressing or revolting or both. Nevertheless, it is with the human beings of the "lowest" common denominator that the dazzle of man's insatiable desire is revealed in stark black and white; they have not made, nor do they have anything to gain by making, the compromises which reconcile the distracted modern to finding his happiness in less than absolute happiness itself.

Unless a reader can appreciate this artistic necessity which dictates to Williams his use of characters from the moral underworld, perhaps it is better for him to leave the short stories unread. Abstracting from the superficially sensational subject matter, he *can* be profoundly moved by Williams' twentieth-century echo "Vanitas vanitatis . . ." and will at least find here a much more profound answer to the meaning of life than that offered by the various and currently popular versions of existentialist despair.

Of course, a sound idea and a basically vindicated technique do not necessarily excuse Williams completely from all responsibility for his aesthetic lapses—and lapses there are. His comments, in the story, "Hard Candy," indicate that he himself is aware of the risk:

The grossly naturalistic details of life, contained in the enormously wide context of life, are softened and qualified by it, but when you attempt to set those details down in a tale, some measure of obscurity or indirection is called for to provide the same or even approximate, softening effect that existence in time gives to those gross elements in the life itself.

To some readers, obviously, he could use considerably more "softening." Despite his caution, certain vulgarities, as well as insensitivity to good taste, whether the result of an inherent misunderstanding of the word *honesty* or a subconsciously exhibitionistic effort to tell "all," manages to nibble away at a reader's supply of tolerance at times; but the net gain to the reader in insight can be more impelling than the loss in revulsion.

Are his heroes, indeed, heroes? Are they not merely case studies in the descent from the lower depths to the lowest? In "Two on a Party," Williams suggests the question and at least *his* answer, when he says of the two "cruising" degenerates:

They're two on a party which has made a departure and a wide one.

Into brutality? No. It's not that simple.

Into vice? No. It isn't nearly that simple.

Into what, then?

Into something unlawful? Yes, of course.

But in the night, hands clasping and no questions asked.

In the morning, a sense of being together no matter what comes, and the knowledge of not having struck nor lied nor stolen.

The answer verges dangerously on the sentimental, but whatever the social or moral level of his subjects, their very aspirations tend to give them a dignity that at first glance they might not seem to deserve; it is their humane yearnings that give them human stature and make them worth investigating.

"Flora" and "John," for example, in "The Important Thing," two students who dabble in socialism and try, successfully, to shock the world, are typical Williams-outsiders. "Flora" belonged nowhere, "she fitted in no place at all, she had no home, no shell, no place of comfort or refuge, she was a fugitive with no place to run to." The pervasive symbol of escape from the personal void into the world of belonging in Williams' stories is sex, but always abortive or frustrating: so here the fumbling attempt is made with the ultimate parting, both "knowing, each [to be] completely separate and alone"—one incident of the long search in "the effort to find something outside common experience, digging, rooting among the formless rubble of things for the one last thing that was altogether lovely" (the lost garden of Eden?). Almost identical plot and theme are used also in "Field of Blue Children."

In "Night of the Iguana" (the story upon which the play is based), where a spinster invades the private world of two homosexuals in a neurotic bid to abolish loneliness, the crisis is reached in a sexual experience which forces each of the trio to face the nature of his own isolated unhappiness.

In Williams' gallery of broken Apollos, half-gods looking for their complements, stands the "fugitive" "Oliver Winemiller" of "One Arm" ("A personality without a center throws up a wall and lives in a state of siege. So Oliver had cultivated his cold and absolute insularity, behind which had lain the ruined city of the crippled champion"); the "lonely, bewildered" "Lucio" of "The Malediction" (who, when his only tie with life, the cat Nitchevo, is dying, crushed and festering, commits suicide, crying, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"); the artist-alien of "Angel in the Alcove" ("He lived in a world completely hostile to him, unrelentingly hostile, and no other being could enter the walls about him for more than the frantic moments desire drove him to"); the infantile "Donald" of "The Vine" ("There was a whole world of things to which he had no entrance, and though he was vain, he was humble at heart, and never scoffed at enthusiasms to which he was an outsider")—and on and on: pimps, prostitutes, homosexuals, nymphomaniacs, a whole confessional of untouchables encased in themselves.

Inevitably the key to unlock their personal prison is sex. For the *lush* "Cora" and the *queen* "Billy" of "Two on a Party" it "dissolved loneliness, any reserve and

suspicion . . . you got the colored lights going" (shades of *Streetcar Named Desire*); for grotesque "Mr. Krupper" of "Hard Candy" (and "Mysteries of the Joy Rio"), hunting in the darkened movie theater, it is a moment of communication, "a pursuit of a pleasure which was almost as unreal and basically unsatisfactory as an embrace in a dream."

Searchers. Searchers. And always the tentative exploration and always the failure. They make the discovery that happiness is transitory, satisfaction elusive and impermanent.

In his own voice we hear Williams in the autobiographical "The Mattress by the Tomato Patch" musing philosophically:

What a cheap little package this is that we have been given to live in, some rubbery kind of machine not meant to wear long, but somewhere in it is a mysterious tenant who knows and describes its being. Who is he and what is he up to? Shadow him, tap his wires, check his intimate associates, if he has any, for there is some occult purpose in his coming to stay here and all the time watching so anxiously out of the windows.

Williams has pictured all men's restless vigil at the windows of the soul—the house may be in a sad state of repair, the windows broken, the sash unpainted, but the tenant is every man, and his desires are infinite. Williams' compassion for the inhabitants of the "cheap little packages" belies the pessimism which is frequently attributed to him. Man, whatever he is, *is* important, he seems to say, even in the most unwholesome setting and beset by the most fantastically wrong-headed desires.

Such a painter of mankind deserves respect, encouragement, and gratitude for not taking the rosy way out—and, perhaps, some day he may even learn to see beyond the problem of here and now to the only inevitable solution—a God of infinite love and understanding.

THE IMAGERY IN THE RELIGIOUS PLAYS OF CHRISTOPHER FRY

By EMIL ROY

Although Christopher Fry is best known as the author of comedies, he has also written several pageants and four religious plays. His only three-act religious play, *The Firstborn*, could also be considered a tragedy. Since his first full-scale success on the commercial stage, the production of *The Lady's Not for Burning* in 1948, Fry has been hailed for his revival—along with T. S. Eliot—of verse drama as a popular form. In fact it has become a critical cliché to disparage his ideas by overpraising his "sheer virtuosity as a poet." In a biographical sketch, for example, Stanley Kunitz remarks "the richness of his verse, the sheer tumble of words and images, his 'cartwheeling leaps of language.'"¹ Marius Bewley feels that the vitality is largely a matter of artificial stimulation, attacks the lack of concrete immediacy in the verse, and concludes that "the surface of his poetry is exasperatingly unyielding to any inner movement."² But Gilbert Highet seems more discerning—and closer to Fry's actual process of creation—in his judgment that "the imagery is valuable because it illuminates new ranges of the mind."³

Fry himself has taken every opportunity to explode the myth of automatic versifying. Of poetic precision he has said:

The whole structure depends upon it, what scene follows another, what character goes and what character enters, where description or landscape becomes part of the action, or where it needs a bare exchange. The poetry and the construction are inseparable.⁴

Not counting his yet-to-be-published *Curtmantle*, Fry's religious plays include *The Boy with a Cart* (1939), *The Firstborn* (1946), *Thor, with Angels* (1948), and *A Sleep of Prisoners* (1951). An inductive study of the imagery in these plays reveals with greater clarity than do the comedies the remarkable evolution of metaphor as a dramatic vehicle. But the intentional creation of a dynamic metaphysical universe, even if it "confirms" and "amplifies" structure (in Wheelwright's terms), also has inherent dangers: it may coerce or even replace forward movement of the action. *Thor, with Angels* is Fry's most notable failure in this regard.

¹ *Twentieth Century Authors, First Supplement*, ed. Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft (New York: 1955), p. 347.

² Marius Bewley, "The Verse of Christopher Fry," *Scrutiny*, XVIII (June 1951), 81.

³ Gilbert Highet, "The Poet and the Modern Stage: Christopher Fry," *People, Places, and Books* (New York: 1953), p. 66.

⁴ Christopher Fry, *An Experience of Critics* (New York: 1953), p. 27.

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Fry's early *The Boy with a Cart*⁵ is an episodic account of the building of a church at Steynman by St. Cuthman. Its emotional tone rises and falls with the "three sorrows [which] come together on him" (p. 2). They result from his father's death, the ridicule of a group of mowers, and the active opposition of a pair of churlish brothers. Moreover, various incidents in the play "parody" or repeat the sorrows with variation. An image which appears in one "sorrow" can usually be found in one or more of the others, and even in a parody. Because Fry's imagery is dramatically ambiguous, metaphors tend to group in clusters which reflect sound-correspondences and personal and traditional symbolism.

The play's tone-giver is the sun; near the end a mysterious carpenter-Christ appears "carved out of sunlight" (p. 39) to help the beaten Cuthman:

His voice

Hovered on memory with open wings

And drew itself up from a chine of silence

As though it had longtime lain in a vein of gold. (p. 39)

Just as "gold" becomes a "god-"symbol, so does "sun" (son) produce a Christ-synecdoche. Moreover, the end is linked to Cuthman's accession to supernatural powers at the beginning of the play when the sun laid his "face on gold" (p. 3). After the evening turns "a friendly face" (p. 24), Cuthman's quest for the church-site ends: he finds a hill where "the sun will beat on the bell" (p. 29). "Vein of gold" clearly puns on both *ore* and *blood*, while the ritual communion of Father and Son (symbolized by the Blood and Body of the Mass) provides a divine replacement for Cuthman's own dead parent.

Most of the other image clusters take their character from the sun or its synecdoches to link incidents in the plot with character development. For example, a sun-clothing-water cluster implies maturity. When Cuthman begins his quest, he remarks, "We shall never look again at the sun on the white walls, my swaddling clothes put out to dry" (p. 12). During his second "sorrow," when the mowers taunt him as "baby boy," a sudden divine rainstorm ruins their crops. A grass-water-eye cluster carries out a similar function in the first two "sorrows," but not later in the play.

Instead it is animal images—horse, dog, and bird metaphors—that link the sorrows with each other and with most of the parodies. Dog imagery tends to call up fire (passion) and eye (God) to extend the sun symbolism. The whole cluster appears in Cuthman's warning to the churlish Fipps brothers in the third "sorrow": "There's one fire in me that no man shall put out. . . . I have the unsleeping eyes of a watchdog" (p. 32). In each case, the tendency of a watchdog to bite, bark, and hang on tenaciously represents strong human desire; the cluster usually appears when Cuthman begins one of his desperate quests. Horse and bird imagery, on the other

⁵ New York, 1939.

hand, directs attention to God, the continuing force in human existence. Although "God rode up [Cuthman's] spirit and drew in" (p. 21) beside him, Cuthman must still "plug" and "plod out his vision" (p. 23). It is only later that he "stampeded into his manhood" (p. 34). Like horse and dog, birds are sun-metonyms: "the larks dissolve in sun" (p. 1).

The shift in the plot from an early focused unity to a welter of parodies, conflicts, and entrances of minor characters partly explains the greater range of animal clusters. In most instances, the form and effectiveness of the images are more dependent on character change than on plot movement. Shifts in emotion or maturity, and the entrance of a *deus ex machina* are more important than variations between "sorrows." Whole blocks of imagery could shift among "sorrows" without any great loss of dramatic coherence.

Fry's single tragedy, *The Firstborn*,⁶ dramatizes Moses' successful attempt to free the Hebrews from captivity. The organization of the imagery of this play is clearly transitional. Fry still uses static imagery as in *The Boy with a Cart*: it extends by association from a hand-music-dust cluster. On the other hand, a significant part of the imagery follows a dynamic cyclical pattern. The metaphorical alternation of departure and return, rise and fall, and dark and light "confirms" the scene charges between palace and tent, the birth-death pattern implied by the title, and the mystic "interchange of earth with everlasting" (p. 72). Both image-patterns are versions of each other. They originate with the sacred quest which in *The Boy with a Cart* emerged as the "joint action of root and sky, of man and God" (p. 1). The poetic ambiguity of "joint" (hand and invisible link) not only forms a dominant image cluster in *The Firstborn*; its reappearance indicates Fry's continuing effort to lift the audience "out of time and space onto the plane of the universal."⁷

The static imagery of the play might be visualized as a spider web. From the simple hand-music-dust cluster radiate myriads of synecdoches. Their function is to magnify the isolation of the characters into images of universal chaos. When Anath vainly shuffles her "fingers in the dust to find the name we once were known by" (p. 55), she uses the whole cluster to recall a nightmare of desertion and sterility. From "hand" extends metaphors of fingers, fists, arms, bones, fighting, percussion, sculpting, and striking. When the water turns to blood, Moses exclaims:

We with our five bare fingers

Have caused the strings of God to sound.

Creation's mutehead is dissolving. (p. 45)

But his *hubris* is intensified by his attempts to save Rameses. Futilely, he calls together the five surviving characters as "five fingers to close into a hand to strike death clean away" (p. 83).

⁶ London, 1958.

⁷ F. M. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus* (Arnold, 1907), p. 144.

From "music" extends imagery of song, keys, lute, loom, torture rack, voices, and words. For example, Teusret's angelic lute has for its demonic synecdoches the vengeful bow of god, the loom of fate which pulls the characters together, and the rack of torture that tears apart: "Our lives go on the loom and our land weaves" (p. 34).

And from "dust" comes synecdoches of sand, storms, dirtiness, cracks, and draughts. Like the rest of the cluster, dust-and-mud imagery amplifies Moses' search for clarity in "this drouthy overwatered world" (p. 47). The similarity of clouds and tide in "a sea of cloud . . . pouring onto the beaches of the sun" (p. 63) not only predicts the guiding pillar of smoke; it fulfills Moses' role as new Adam. Anath had mistakenly thought Moses "was a dust-storm we had shut out" (p. 7). The process revealed in the entire hand-music-dust cluster clearly resembles Coleridge's "fancy," a creative faculty which

has not other counters to play with but fixities and definites [and] must receive all its materials ready-made from the law of association.⁸

The dynamic or "imaginative" imagery of the play is organized rather by the ritual of sacrifice. After killing the Egyptian overseer, Moses had undergone a spiritual death which symbolizes the mass murder of his fellow Hebrews. From the tomb which Seti's inhumanity has created for the Hebrews have come poisonous mists, demons, and ghostly voices. From the womb-like darkness of Moses' mind, the dishonored Hebrew blood rises to renew the land like a tide of new life. The tide of divine vengeance wrecks the ship of state. As in *The Boy with a Cart*, dynamic imagery reflects the cosmic motion of the "round of light which will not wheel in vain" (p. 87).

The spiritual world of the play is Manichean. Both Rameses and Moses are characterized by sun-light associations, while the tyrannical Seti is a darkness figure. Moreover, Seti sees Rameses as Rameses views Moses. But while Moses seems "clear and risen roundly over the hazes" (p. 27), Seti finally recognizes, "I overbranch the light" (p. 27) which is his son, and perhaps Moses too. As a result, Rameses fails to become, like Moses, a "flying spark attempting the ultimate fire" (p. 41). He merely smoulders in the burning coffin of Seti's restraints. On the other hand, Fry reserves the darkness of decay and disease for Seti. The Pharaoh who had "blotted" Moses out of the records applies the black bread of policy to the Hebrews and stifles Rameses' spirit.

With its ironic attributes of pulsation, nourishment and decay, revival and drowning, blood is an effective image of nemesis. Because it works in man's body as the oceans do on earth, blood can be symbolically projected on the seas of space. Because Seti had murdered the Hebrew nation, he must suffer until "pity came out of [him] like blood" (p. 55). Moses identifies the bloody wells with retribution: "The spilt blood of Israelites . . . is flowing back on Egypt" (p. 51). Only through sacrifice can *mana*, the life-force, be renewed.

⁸ "The Imagination," *Criticism: The Major Texts*, ed. W. J. Bate (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 38.

The worst effects of a living death are disembodiment, hallucination, and nightmare: "Here's my name without a man to it" (p. 77). Earth is animated, words become things, and animal imagery—benign to the Hebrews—becomes malign to the Egyptians. Moreover, the inner conflict which emerges in metaphors of death, delusion, and disease has its social manifestations in images of miscarriage, prostitution, and incest. Spiritual perversion infects Egyptian and Hebrew alike. Thus Anath condemns Seti for stirring

up the muck

Which the sweet gods thought fit to make us of

When they first formed man, the primal putrescence

We keep hidden under our thin dress of health.

What a pretty world, this world of filthmade kings! (p. 55)

Ironically, both the Egyptian Seti and the Hebrew Shendi are threatened by Moses' return. They use ship-imagery to symbolize their own perversion. Seti finds "something shipwreck" (p. 13) about Moses, while Shendi screams "I know you'd founder me if you had the chance—" (p. 71). Seti's antidote is a bride for Rameses. Phipa:

Homegoing sailors,

When there are no stars, steer perfectly for Syria

Merely by thinking of her. (p. 35)

But ironically, her arrival accompanies the destruction of both Seti and Shendi. Renewal means the death of corruption.

In a further stretch of poetic ambiguity, imagery of heavenly bodies works cosmic change as well as human redemption. Once the "inquisition of stars" (p. 74) pronounces guilt on Shendi, Rameses, and Seti, Aaron notices that "the stars are fading in silence" (p. 85). Rameses and Shendi die; Phipa, the "magnitude out of Syria" (p. 77), then arrives. All that is left for Seti is his recognition of historical, divine, and personal defeat:

You [Moses] found us in the morning.

Leave us with what remains of the night.

The day you found us in is over. (p. 86)

On one hand, then, a fanciful hand-music-dust cluster represents the Creation motif which underlies the emotional involvements of the characters. On the other hand, dynamic imagery reflects cosmic, natural, and human rhythms. It not only indicates the double issue of the play, Moses victorious, and Seti defeated; it differentiates the characters and provides an effective density of texture for the structure.

In *Thor, with Angels*,⁹ the conflict within Cymen is resolved only by the simultaneous sacrifice of a Briton captive and conversion of Cymen to Christianity. By the time Fry wrote this play, his third religious drama, he had already perfected his symbolic universe. This metaphorical world-view appears fully articulated in his comedies, *A Phoenix Too Frequent* (1946) and *The Lady's Not for Burning* (1948).

That is, he has succeeded in representing what he calls

chaos inspired with form: the multiplicity of shape, rhythm, pattern, texture, kind, expounded by one creative impulse. In prose, we convey the eccentricity of things; in poetry, their concentricity, the sense of relationship between them: a belief that all things express the same identity, are all contained in one discipline of revelation.¹⁰

In *Thor, with Angels*, a plethora of synecdoches exhibits the kind of patterns that we have come to expect in Fry. Concrete images interact with their polar opposites, cluster, and link in endless chains with the sun or its attributes.

Light and dark are moral opposites as they were in *The Firstborn*. Light connotes reason, virility, and health; dark signifies fear, impotence, and disease. In contrast to Cymen's and Merlin's "glare of the brain" (p. 24), the villainous Jutes are characterized by darkness-figures. Merlin attacks them as crow-like and charges: "You blackened the veins of the valleys with our dried blood" (p. 32). On the other hand, their Briton captive seems black-haired and thus benighted to the Jutes. Throwing him down, the crazed Cymen threatens to sever "the neck of the dark" (p. 13).

Seasonal imagery of heat and cold also groups the characters: the struggle over Hoel becomes a "natural" illustration of nemesis. When Cymen returns to a cold wife who has been trying to warm the gods with sacrifices, Cymen is ridiculed for his compassion by his relatives, "the dumb icebergs" (p. 8). When they threaten to kill Hoel in cold blood, Cymen figuratively spews "the hot spout of indignation" (p. 13).

Therefore the action of the play presents a microcosm not only of society, but of nature as well. Fry juxtaposes the moving sun, the flight of the human soul, and mankind's search for redemption. Just as the "ship [of state] in full foliage rides in over the February foam" (p. 33), so man "the doting bubble" (p. 24) floats on the "golden bed of the troubled river" (p. 24). Both images, bubble and ship, are derived from the ritual of sacrifice which renews fertility, the "spurt of golden blood, / Winter's wound-in-the-side" (p. 27). In literal and symbolic ways, the changes in human life resemble the tensions between gray winter and gold summer, the grassy green and icy white of the seasons, stormy sea and muddy earth. Every new life, by coming into being, provokes the arrival of avenging death: life is nemesis.

Another manifestation of nemesis, almost a parody of the natural cycle, emerges in the balanced attraction-repulsion urges of sun and earth. The male sun rises,

⁹ London, 1948.

¹⁰ Fry, "Why Verse," *Vogue*, CXXV (March 1, 1955), 137.

spurts bloody fire, and brings forth vegetation; the female earth, with its muddy filth, draws down the sun to undergo a nightly passage through its bowels. As in *The Boy with a Cart*, fire and the sun are god-images. Once Cymen has rejected the "unwearying, turbulent, blazing loins of Woden" (p. 14), he can see "the love of God hung on the motes and beams of light" (p. 52). The sun's phallicism recurs in Merlin's tower, the thrust of sword into snow, the breach of the sky by bird song, and—most notably—the Arimathean myth of "old Joseph's faithful staff breaking into scarlet bud in the falling snow" (p. 28).

On the other hand, earthiness is linked with impotence and death: the earth-goddess brings forth man only to destroy him. Just as Merlin brings the earth "the devotion of my dust" (p. 25), Martina jokes that Hoel's shadowing love will make him "bite the dust" (p. 47). The Jutes believe the gods lust for the body of the earth, and Cymen complains as Anath had in *The Firstborn*: "The skirts of the gods drag in our mud" (p. 26).

Not only theme and action but characterization are furthered by "earthiness." Rusty Colgrin and Merlin with "the red earth still on him" (p. 22) are types of the same character, while a pun on "hope" both personifies this word and prepares for the murder: Hoel "hopes" for a steady job in the grave, and Cymen calls "Hope" the digger of "the pit which swallows us at last" (p. 37).

Reversal is characteristic of Fry's image-cosmos. By assimilating moral, psychological, and social change to the natural cycles, Fry universalizes the action. At the same time, he attempts to show through his image-structures the presence of unseen forces. Yet the very completeness of his metaphorical cosmos becomes self-defeating in this play. There is a strong tendency for imagery to coerce or even supplant forward movement. The sensational wolf-attack is dramatically improbable even if it does make divine vengeance tangible. There is, however, abundant use of wolf-like images in references to lions of the air, ghostly teeth, and pains in the back; the wolves, however, have no causal validity. The divine light which broke Cymen's sword and nearly led him to kill his own son instead of Hoel is also metaphorical and not a dramatic mystery.

Fry's fourth religious play, *A Sleep of Prisoners*,¹¹ dramatizes the Biblical stories of Cain and Abel, David and Absalom, Abraham and Isaac, and Shadrac, Meshac, and Obednego. Four prisoners share each other's roles in each other's dreams and learn militantly how to endure pacifically. Despite the somewhat episodic action, the imagery in this play forms a total structure corresponding to the alternating death-rebirth archetypes. A binding or paralysis of the "life force" is followed by a release of that force. Within Fry's characteristic world-view, the forward urge and backward swing of the *tour d'abolie* and the upward thrust and downward plunge of the natural cycles are identified with the rotating polarities of the universe.

¹¹ New York, 1951.

The prisoners' sense that life is a closed, tragic cycle is confirmed by hollow images of darkness, metaphors of disease, pain, and sickness, and natural images of winter, sterility, and deathly quiescence. Both symbolically, and in terms of the structure of the play, "The future is like a great pit" (p. 19). For these "prisoners of the dark" (p. 32), the body has become a marrow bed, a filthy volcano, a cask of ribs. Moreover, human gentleness is only a thin veil over long scars from the nails of warring hearts. Through an imaginative juxtaposition of images of the body, the imprisoning church, and the world, Fry makes all appear cage-like. All of the prisoners are trapped by life and desperately seek the release of the soul through death. Because they are caught by their dream-state between life and death, they feel a dead Christian's impatience for the Last Judgment, which will unite body and soul.

In the absence of a purifying penance, however, their efforts have become perverted and diseased. David objects to the smell of cooped-up angels in the church and condemns Peter for making tea in a "festering" bomb-hole. But as Peter (in his Absalom-role) remarks later, "Hell is in my father's head" (p. 24), not in the world alone. The sterile purposelessness of the four men is further emphasized by wintry metaphors of cold and drouth. After mocking Peter because nothing is worth "getting warmed up about," (p. 6) David himself finds the dice frozen in his fist. Not until the four enter the searing heat of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace does the frozen misery of centuries break: even then, the warmth of salvation feels, to the prisoners' numbed spirits, like "Scalding God" (p. 43).

From the cosmic context of demonic torture, disease, and frozen despair emerges a redemptive water cycle. All the characters must undergo a death-plunge, an underwater passage, and a re-emergence which resemble the rhythms of daily life. Man sleeps, dreams, and awakens—both literally and in the dramatic movement of the play. So does the sun-god, in a natural manifestation of the life, death, and rebirth of the soul. These similitudes dimly shadow the Adamic creation through the divine muddying of mortal earth, and incidentally sanction Fry's metaphysical yoking of heterogeneous spiritual elements: "Each man is the world" (p. 45).

The entrance or "death by drowning" dramatically parts soul from the body, saints from sinners. Ironically, sleep, drowning, and penance are analogous. All those who fear the unconscious, the nightmare, and hell use voyaging imagery to symbolize their isolation from a saving God. The second phase of the water cycle imaginatively recreates the redemptive experience: imagery of washing, quenching, or cooling water "confirms" the reconciliation which ends each movement. The third and final phase of the water cycle is a decisive emergence from the "mould of passion" (p. 16). It counters and remedies the disease, rot, and putrefaction of the sinful body.

While the source of Fry's imagery in *A Sleep of Prisoners* lies in hollow, dark images of water, the shifts among balanced opposites effectively confirm the theologi-

cal ties between the Many and the One. Thus the imagery assimilates the forward urge and backward swing of the *tour d'abolie* (dream vs. reality, heaven and hell, donkey man and Nebuchadnezzar, the seasons), the daily cyclical recurrences (light and dark, fire and water, heat and cold) to the fixed cosmic revolutions (height and depth imagery, air and ocean).

This study of Fry has focused not only on the deliberate, calculated design of his verse; it has also shown the integrative, purposeful organization of images about theme, structure, characterization, and archetypes. If Fry sometimes faults as poetic dramatist, his weakness lies in his attempt to assimilate both miracle and action within poetry. But the importance of his achievement must be judged by both the difficulty and magnitude of his chosen task. Like the lovers in his comedy, *A Phoenix Too Frequent*,¹² Fry is seeking a "new perspective," a "climax to the vision." He is questing for an epiphany which flashes behind reality to illuminate "the apparition of the world within one body." To the extent that the inexpressible can serve dramatic ends and still maintain its own integrity, Fry's poetic virtuosity reaches a high degree of completeness.

¹² London, 1946.

THE QUEST FOR OBJECTIVITY IN HAZLITT'S DRAMATIC CRITICISM

By JOHN L. MAHONEY

In almost every way William Hazlitt represents the culmination of that evolving empirical tradition in English criticism which was chiefly concerned with focussing attention on the way in which art is created and on the response of the human sensibility to what has been created. He is always less concerned with the more classical problems of imitation, form, and moral effect than he is with "gusto," with "sympathy," in short, with the whole matter of emotional excitement. Almost any of his discussions of poetry, drama, or of art in general illustrates this concern. "Poetry," he writes, "is the language of the imagination and the passions. It relates to whatever gives immediate pleasure or pain to the human mind. It comes home to the bosoms and businesses of men; for nothing but what so comes home to them in the most general and intelligible shape can be a subject for poetry. Poetry is the universal language which the heart holds with nature and itself."¹ Gusto, the great feature of all art of the first order, the quality manifested especially in Shakespeare, is nothing but "power or passion defining any object."²

This underlying preoccupation with emotional strength in a work of art is, of course, too well known to bear any lengthy reexamination. The studies of Walter Jackson Bate have called striking attention to its centrality in the writings of the great critic.³ What has not been stressed enough, however, is Hazlitt's rather sharp and distinctive qualification of the term "emotion" with all its highly subjective connotations, a qualification which undercuts almost completely some of the easy and popular generalizations about romanticism and the romantic approach to art.

Perhaps more than any of his romantic contemporaries, Hazlitt was aware of the serious dangers involved in a criterion of emotional immediacy, of subjectivism, and he persistently singled out for criticism excessive manifestations of it in drama, in art, or in human experience. To him man's emotional nature is essential, but

¹ "On Poetry in General," *Lectures on the English Poets*, Lecture 1, in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe (London and Toronto, 1930), V, 1. All references to Hazlitt are to this edition.

² "On Gusto," *The Round Table*, in *Complete Works*, IV, 77.

³ See particularly his *From Classic to Romantic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1949), pp. 93-192 and his *Criticism: The Major Texts* (New York, 1952), pp. 281-292. See also Elizabeth Schneider, *The Aesthetics of William Hazlitt* (Philadelphia, 1933); John Bullitt, "Hazlitt and the Romantic Concept of the Imagination," *Philological Quarterly*, XXIV (1945), 343-361; L. P. Clarke, "Hazlitt as a Critic of Art," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, XXXIX (1924), 179-202.

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potentially dangerous; moderation is the great need. Greatness in art, as in moral action, involves losing the sense of personality. Shakespeare, he contends, had this quality to the highest degree; "he had only to think of anything in order to become that thing."⁴

True emotion, then, is a virile thing; it is turned outward toward its object, not inward on the self. Hazlitt argues that mere personal feeling becomes too much a part of the works of poets like Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley. For him the basic problem with Rousseau and Wordsworth was the same. "We conceive that Rousseau's exclamation, '*Ah, voila de la pervenche*,' comes more home to the mind than Mr. Wordsworth's discovery of the linnet's nest 'with five blue eggs,' or than his address to the cuckoo, beautiful as we think it is. . . . Both create an interest out of nothing, or rather out of their own feelings. . . . Rousseau, in a word, interests you in certain objects by interesting you in himself: Mr. Wordsworth would persuade you that certain objects are interesting in themselves, because he is interested in them."⁵ On the other hand, Shakespeare and Milton did not "surround the meanest objects with the . . . devouring egotism of the writer's own minds." They "owe their power over the human mind to their having had a deeper sense than others of what was grand in the objects of nature, or affecting in the events of human life."⁶

Paralleling this justification of and praise for emotional intensity is Hazlitt's abiding suspicion of abstraction, his absolute dedication to the concrete reality which he felt art must mirror, a suspicion and a dedication which point up most graphically his emphasis on the artist's need for an intense, objective understanding of what is beyond the personal and subjective, for a firm grasp of reality. "The arts hold immediate communication with nature, and are only derived from that source."⁷ Using painting as a concrete example, he writes:

Nature is the soul of art. There is a strength in the imagination that reposes entirely on nature that nothing else can supply. There is in the old poets and painters a vigour and grasp of mind, a full possession of their subject, a confidence and firm faith, a sublime simplicity, an elevation of thought, proportioned to their depth of feeling, an increasing force and impetus, which moves, penetrates, and kindles all that comes in contact with it, which seems, not theirs, but given to them. It is this reliance on the power of nature which has produced those masterpieces by the Prince of Painters.⁸

⁴ "On Shakespeare and Milton," Lecture III in *Lectures on the English Poets*, in *Complete Works*, V, 48.

⁵ "On the Character of Rousseau," *The Round Table*, in *Complete Works*, IV, 92.

⁶ "Shakespeare and Milton," *Complete Works*, V, 53.

⁷ "Why the Arts Are Not Progressive?—A Fragment," *The Round Table*, in *Complete Works*, IV, 160.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 162.

Hazlitt's insistence on the need for art to confront the flux of reality is at the root of his conception of the sympathetic imagination. For him the imagination was no mere picture-making faculty; it could in a very real way go out of itself, could enter into the identity of its object, and hence gain a wondrous concreteness and objectivity. Shakespeare was the sublime exemplar of this faculty which, he felt, was so lacking in the poetry of his own age. Imagination was the great producer of gusto which consists "in giving this truth of character from the truth of feeling, whether in the highest or the lowest degree, but always in the highest degree of which the subject is capable."⁹

It is gusto which pervades every great work of art. In the paintings of Titian, "not only do his heads seem to think—his bodies seem to feel."¹⁰ Likewise "Michaelangelo's forms are full of gusto. They everywhere obtrude the sense of power upon the eye. . . . The gusto of Michaelangelo consists in expressing energy of will without proportionable sensibility, Correggio's in expressing exquisite sensibility without energy of will. In Correggio's faces as well as figures we see neither bones nor muscles, but what a soul is there, full of sweetness and of grace—pure, playful, soft, angelical!"¹¹

Hazlitt was, of course, firmly opposed to the familiar neoclassic doctrine of imitation. For him genuine imitation was an imaginative activity, stirring the faculty to make comparisons, to realize things more vividly.

Imitation renders an object, displeasing in itself, a source of pleasure, not by repetition of the same idea, but by suggesting new ideas, by detecting new properties, and endless shades of difference, just as a close and continued contemplation of an object itself would do. Art shows us nature, divested of the medium of our prejudices. It divides and decompounds objects into a thousand curious parts, which may be full of variety, beauty, and delicacy in themselves, though the object to which they belong may be disagreeable in its general appearance, or by association with other ideas.¹²

At the same time he remained quite firmly opposed to the cult of original genius, the cult of those who would use art simply as a vehicle for liberating individual temperament. It was, he felt, relatively easy to express subjective feeling; what was really difficult was capturing the living reality of nature. Only imagination can confront reality with integrity, can render experience more immediate

⁹ "On Gusto," *Complete Works*, IV, 77.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹² "On Imitation," *The Round Table*, in *Complete Works*, IV, 73-74.

and meaningful, and can direct this experience to what is individual and concrete by its perception of the hidden analogies of things.

Art, then, for Hazlitt is no merely subjective thing, no mere outlet for personal feeling; it is a heightened presentation of an intensely grasped and intensely felt concrete reality. Its object is truth and the most concrete representation of it. Furthermore, art is greater in proportion to its relationship with human life, human character being the greatest object of art, and drama the best adapted of all the arts to express the truth of human character.

Shakespeare as a dramatist exemplified for Hazlitt almost all the requisites for great art. First of all, "he was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself; but he was all that others were, or that they could become."¹³ The variety of his characterization was unchallenged. He surpassed even Chaucer whose "characters are sufficiently distinct from one another, but they are too little varied in themselves, too much like identical propositions."¹⁴ His consideration and comparison of the characters of Chaucer, Milton, and Shakespeare are extremely searching and suggest most vividly his whole approach to this aspect of criticism.

Chaucer's characters are narrative, Shakespeare's dramatic, Milton's epic. That is, Chaucer told only as much of his story as he pleased, as was required for a particular purpose. He answered for his characters himself. In Shakespeare they are introduced upon the stage, are liable to be asked all sorts of questions, and are forced to answer for themselves. In Chaucer we perceive a fixed essence of character. In Shakespeare there is a continual composition and decomposition of its elements, a fermentation of every particle in the whole mass, by its alternate affinity or antipathy to other principles which are brought in contact with it. . . . Milton took only a few simple principles of character, and raised them to the utmost conceivable grandeur, and refined them from every base alloy. He sat retired and kept his state alone, 'playing with wisdom' while Shakespeare mingled with the crowd, and played the host, 'to make society the sweeter welcome.'¹⁵

Shakespeare modified passion by passion. The dialogue in *King Lear*, in *Macbeth*, and in *Julius Caesar* is an excellent example of this fluctuation of passion. "It is like the sea, agitated this way and that, and loud-lashed by furious storms; while in the still pauses of the blast, we distinguish only the cries of despair, or the silence of death."¹⁶ Shakespeare's imagination was rapid, plastic, and devious, writing the most opposite extremes. "In Milton there is always an appearance of effort: in Shakespeare, scarcely any."¹⁷

¹³ "Shakespeare and Milton," *Complete Works*, V, 47.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 52.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

Hazlitt, as has already been suggested, represents a kind of high point in the continuing romantic demand for a justification of emotional immediacy in art, but, more important, he is the great spokesman for an understanding of emotional immediacy in an objective, concrete way as a going out of the feelings, to achieve a firm grasp of reality, a sharing of this grasp, and an expression of this sharing in a vivid, intense manner.

DRAMA BOOKSHELF

THE OXFORD IBSEN, VOL. V: PILLARS OF SOCIETY, A DOLL'S HOUSE, GHOSTS. Translated and edited by James Walter McFarlane. New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1961; pp. 499. \$7.00.

This is the second volume of a projected complete edition of Ibsen's works to be published by the Oxford Press. James Walter McFarlane, editor and translator of both volumes (the first, published as volume VI, contained *An Enemy of the People*, *The Wild Duck* and *Rosmerholm*), has apparently decided to start in the middle of the Ibsen canon and work out from the more familiar plays like *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* of the present volume to the fascinating but more difficult dramas of the playwright's early and late periods.

Mr. McFarlane has wisely chosen to write a book of criticism, *Ibsen and the Temper of Norwegian Literature*, before he begins his task of editing. It is almost too difficult for a man to act as critic and editor at the same time, for the functions of each are quite distinct. While the critic tells us what he thinks the author is trying to say, the editor presents the author who is allowed to speak for himself. We need both men, but not at one time. In the present book, Mr. McFarlane limits himself to a relatively brief introduction of 17 pages; then he steps aside and devotes the remaining 482 pages exclusively to the author.

This volume contains three plays of Ibsen's so-called realist period, *Pillars of Society* (1877), *A Doll's House* (1879), and *Ghosts* (1881). The editor not only gives the complete text of each play but also a number of earlier draft versions so that the reader can observe the growth from an idea in the playwright's notes into a completed drama. There is another feature that will attract students of Ibsen. At the end of the volume the editor has added several appendixes that contain further valuable manuscript information, contemporary reaction to the plays, comments of the author, and a select but scholarly bibliography.

As a translator Mr. McFarlane tends more toward the literal than the arresting in his turn of dialogue. But his aim has not been to startle but to reconcile "... these two factors—making something that to the knowledgeable was recognizably a 'translation' and not a 'free-rendering' or 'adaptation' or something equally undisciplined, and yet at the same time making the lines 'sayable.'" Despite occasional awkwardness, the translation reads well, even at times brilliantly.

In undertaking the formidable task of a complete edition, Mr. McFarlane has rendered a service to those genuinely interested in the theater. Mr. William Archer's twelve volume edition of Ibsen, completed half a century ago, is the first and last complete edition in English. True, there are many single editions of the more popular of Ibsen's twenty-five completed plays (one counts thirteen current editions in paperback alone). It would be difficult to number, for example, the times that *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *The Wild Duck*, and *Rosmerholm* have appeared in anthologies. There is hardly a high school student who can escape from senior English without

being exposed to the "father of modern drama." But the "classicizing" of Ibsen has created its own problems. A few generalizations become popular, two or three plays are taken for the whole Ibsen, and the result is that we frequently do not read the plays to discover what the author is saying. We are satisfied to have an explanation given to us in a foreword. Thus the narrow rut is deepened in which the playwright finds a quiet and conventional grave.

If we are to understand Ibsen today, we must not be satisfied with a facile analysis of the surface realism of many of his plays. There are two or three levels at which we can approach his work: the first reflects the thesis drama or well-made play of the last century; the second reveals Ibsen's conflicts with the accepted ideas of his day; the third and most significant concerns itself with the symbolic action of his characters. Ibsen can be read at any of these levels, but it is at the third level where his dramatic genius is most evident. On today's stage the well-made plots of Ibsen's plays seem to creak a bit; his social doctrine, if it has not lost its validity, has at least settled into the category of familiar ideas. Bernard Shaw observed in 1891 that Walter Scott's *The Heart Midlothian* was every bit as outrageous as Ibsen's *Ghosts*. The only reason that Scott was accepted and Ibsen damned by the critics is that "Scott's views are familiar to all well-brought-up ladies and gentlemen, whereas Ibsen's are for the moment so strange to them as to be unthinkable." Now the situation is quite different, and Ibsen has achieved the respectability of a Scott when he is compared, for instance, to a Tennessee Williams.

Despite Shaw's championship of Ibsen's advanced social ideas, it has not been on the merit of these that he has continued to be read and acted. Immediately following the publication of *A Doll's House*, for example, many well-intentioned people hailed Ibsen as the champion of women's rights, just as in our own generation Arthur Miller was attacked as an enemy of all salesmen. Although Nora's slamming door might have been heard throughout Europe, Ibsen did not cast himself in the role of crusader. He disappointed the Norwegian Women's Rights League and incidentally threw considerable light on himself for subsequent generations when he frankly told the ladies of the League: "I have been more of a poet and less of a social philosopher than people generally seem inclined to believe. I thank you for your good wishes, but I must decline the honor of being said to have worked for the Women's Rights movement. I am not even sure what Women's Rights actually are."

Now that we stand outside the social ferment of Ibsen's era, we are better able to appreciate Ibsen as a poet and less as a social philosopher than were his contemporaries. To call Ibsen a poet may strike us as gratuitous, but such a view of the playwright is by no means new. To mention only two critics, both American, who hold such a view, we have only to go back sixteen years. Eric Bentley in *The Playwright as Thinker* pointed out that Ibsen "made out of his realism a new and much less overt romanticism." Furthermore, he observed, "... the symbolism which is the most tangible sign of the anti-realistic or romantic Ibsen is present in each of the realistic plays." A few years later, Francis Fergusson made an analysis of *Ghosts* in which he found a deeper level of meaning beyond the mere thriller and thesis play. He discovered in the story of Mrs. Alving a genuinely tragic theme that has more lasting significance than the diatribe against the conventional Victorian marriage that Ibsen had set out to write. The same analysis, as the critic showed, might have been made of any other of Ibsen's realistic plays.

We cannot forget that Ibsen began his career on the stage with the romanticism of *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* and ended with the complex symbolism of *When We Dead Awaken*. What lies in the intervening thirty-four years must somehow relate these two termini. To understand Ibsen, we must understand the whole of his work, for he was convinced, as Fergusson points out, that his "poetry was to be found only in the series of his plays, no one of which was complete by itself." We may thank Mr. McFarlane for undertaking to make this understanding possible in his complete edition.

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MOVIES, MORALS, AND ART. By Frank Getlein and Harold C. Gardiner, S.J.
New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961; pp. 179. \$4.50.

This is one of three books having as their purpose an artistic and moral evaluation of motion pictures in the light of official papal teaching contained in such documents as the *Miranda Provisus* of Pius XII in 1957, and the *Vigilanti Cura* of Pius XI in 1936. The other two are *The Screen Arts* by Edward Fischer, which is also a guide to television, and *The Image Industries* by William F. Lynch, S.J., which studies the relationship between theology and the artistic imagination. These two books are also published by Sheed and Ward.

Movies, Morals, and Art is really two books in one. The first part consists of a discussion of the art of the movies by Frank Getlein, at present the art critic for the *New Republic*. The second section of the book gives a moral evaluation of motion pictures by Father Harold Gardiner, S.J., the widely known literary critic and Literary Editor of *America*. Neither author knew what the other was writing.

Mr. Getlein gives an excellent, readable, and informative historical sketch of the development of the movie industry in the United States. Nor does he neglect the evil effect of money on such matters as the evolving of the "star system." He deals adequately and interestingly with the contribution of such innovators as D. W. Griffith and Mack Sennett. Sometimes he ranges at large over art in general. Of particular interest to Catholic art students is his criticism of Eric Gill and Jacques Maritain for their blurring of the distinction between fine and useful arts.

In the second part of the volume Father Gardiner devotes himself to the moral evaluation of the movies. Basically he applies to motion pictures the same principles of morality that he has used so successfully in his *Norms for the Novel*. He demands that sin be recognized as sin—as a human act involving will and intelligence. He insists that for the truly mature person a morally objectionable part of a picture need not necessarily invalidate the good moral effect of the whole movie. As always, Father Gardiner writes clearly with his distinctions sharply drawn, and his examples striking. For instance, in the very first page of his discussion, he thus boldly states his fundamental principle: "I hold—and many agree with me—that the *total* artistic judgment, the *complete* critical evaluation of a piece of art, includes a moral dimension."

The overall effect of this book, however, can be somewhat confusing. Both writers invade each other's territory, for both find it necessary to deal with art and morality. Hence there is a certain amount of repetition as well as a good deal of stress on what is perfectly obvious in the first place.

But these slight defects should not invalidate the worth of *Movies, Morals, and Art* for Catholic schools, study clubs, and for individual Catholics who, as Father Gardiner hopes, will learn to view the films with more artistic and moral discrimination.

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DRAMA ON STAGE. By Randolph Goodman. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1961; pp. 475. \$6.50.

"From Athens to Broadway" might well summarize the contents of *Drama on Stage*. Professor Randolph Goodman informs us that "It is the aim of this book to help the reader catch 'the meaning of the stage.'" To achieve this aim he uses *Medea, Everyman, Macbeth, The Misanthrope, A Streetcar Named Desire, and The Visit*. Professor Goodman selects these plays on the basis of traditional type and number of significant productions. In each case he discusses the background of the period in which the play was written and cites the various developments in drama that are taking place. In this manner the reader is given a brief but comprehensive history of western drama.

In order that his reader be brought to an understanding of the "meaning of drama on stage," he gives a history of the production of each of the plays to the present. This involves a consideration of the technical aspects of production, directors, actors, and costuming. Further, he couples with this, interesting interviews with such luminaries as Robert Whitehead, Ernst Deutsch, Sir Laurence Olivier, and Maurice Valency.

Professor Goodman, using a clear and concise style, provides more than "at least a clue to the 'meaning' of the business of the theater," for either the general reader or the serious student of drama in *Drama on Stage*, his most recent undertaking.

Robert A. Lodge, Ph.D.
University of Scranton

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